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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP (HARRIS)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI ARABIA H1N1 UPDATE

REF: RIYADH 00761

¶1. (SBU) On June 14, the Ministry of Health (MOH) spokesman Dr. Khalid Al-Mirghalani confirmed a total of 14 cases of H1N1 since June 3, and new cases are being reported steadily.

The Ministry identified infected persons via thermal screening at airports in Jeddah, Dammam, Medina, and Riyadh, and by testing individuals who had been in contact with known H1N1-positive patients. Ten of the patients had returned to Saudi Arabia from the United States, two from the Philippines, and two from Canada. The MOH spokesman said that all of the patients, save the first case, are under the care of specialist doctors in reputable hospitals equipped with modern facilities. The first case, a Filipina nurse, was discharged from the hospital and has reportedly returned to work, and the Health Ministry has indicated that the 14 flu cases to date have been relatively mild and easily treatable.

¶2. (SBU) The local press has quoted Deputy Health Minister Al-Zahrani as saying that MOH has "made arrangements to screen incoming pilgrims, store adequate quantities of medicine to meet emergency situations, and has equipped laboratories to carry out tests to identify the disease." Reportedly the Shoura Council has summoned the Minister of health Abdullah Al-Rabeah to discuss H1N1, as the Council believes urgent attention is required in view of the upcoming summer season, when the Hajj begins and up to two million or more religious pilgrims are expected.

¶3. (SBU) The U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC) is sending a delegation to guide the MOH's preparedness and planning efforts for this summer's influx of pilgrims. The delegation will meet June 27-30 with public health officials from the Gulf Cooperation Council.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The SAG is acting along the lines that al-Zahrani explained to Emboffs (reftel): undertaking greater surveillance while aligning its travel advisory policies with WHO guidelines. MOH has imposed no restrictions on either passengers or exports. The local press is covering the new outbreaks promptly, providing both MOH hotlines and MOH guidance. Meanwhile, the Grand Mufti has issued a "religious verdict" forbidding travel to countries which have reported cases of swine flu, which was described as the result of human sin. We doubt this will have any practical impact, at least as far as travel to the United States is concerned.

ERDMAN